

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A platform for managing services offered by a plurality of sources, the platform comprising:

a platform server having a software subscription module configured thereon and including a communications port for establishing communication with a wide area network,

the software subscription module comprising a graphic user interface and a backend support module for enabling retrieval and display of a list of available software offerings, selection of a particular offering, and deselection of previously selected offerings.

2. The platform of claim 1 wherein the plurality of sources comprises a plurality of application service providers.

3. The platform of claim 1 further comprising a database management server, the database management server being configured to interact with a plurality of platform servers and storing a list of applications to be made available to the platform servers and a plurality of lists of applications selected for use by networks associated with the platform servers.

4. The platform of claim 1 wherein the database management server is further configured to store historical data relevant to applications selected by each of the platform servers.
5. The platform of claim 1 wherein the database management server is further configured to issue email instructions to persons responsible for program initiation tasks when a defined application is selected for use by a network associated with a selected platform server.

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6. A computer program product comprising:

programming instructions for enabling an applications management server to retrieve from a master database server via a wide area network a list of offerings that are available to a local area network;

programming instructions for enabling selection of one or more of the offerings for use by the local area network; and

programming instructions for enabling de-selection of one or more offerings currently available for use by the local area network.

7. The computer program product of claim 6 further comprising instructions for enabling the applications management server to retrieve historical information concerning previously selected offerings from the master database server.

8. A method for managing a plurality of applications service providers, the method comprising the steps of:

coupling an applications management server to a local area network,

coupling the applications management server to a database management server via a wide area network,

coupling the database management server to a plurality of application service provider servers via the wide area network,

storing within the database management server a listing of a plurality of applications to be made available by the application service provider servers,

storing within the database management server a listing of applications previously selected by the applications management server,

allowing the applications management server upon instruction from a related network appliance to query the database management server for the listings of applications to be made available by the application service provider servers and applications previously selected by the applications management server,

allowing the applications management server upon instruction from the related network appliance to select one or more applications for use by a network associated with the network appliance, and

in response to instructions received from the applications management server, causing the database management server to contact one or more of the application service provider servers associated with the selected one or more applications to cause those application service provider servers to make the selected applications available to the network.

9. The method of claim 8, wherein the applications management server and database management server are coupled to one another over the Internet.